

The Monastic Life

by Joel S. Goldsmith

Cut off from all emotional attachments, knowing no deep devotion to any person or thing, one may live the monastic life while still in the world, but not of it.

Often the monastic life is lived with a deep concern for mankind -- with the desire to uplift, serve, and sometimes save the world - - yet there is no deep love for any individual, nor is there a need for mother, brother, wife, or friend.

Many who 'give up the world' to abide in a monastery or convent find that complete separation from loved ones, or from being loved, is beyond their power. There has not yet come to them the necessary insulation from worldly love and care. The monastic life, even when lived in the world, is completely insulated so that there is no emotional interchange in human relationships. In this spiritual insulation, one lives in devotion to human service and spiritual regeneration -- but without involvement in personal emotions. It is this spiritual insulation which makes possible the life of aloneness lived by mystics. Yet, the very qualities emanating from the mystics' aloneness are the blessing to all who touch, or are touched by the mystic's life. Emotion would be a drain, depleting the spiritual power inherent in the true monastic life.

It is doubtful if the monastic life can be cultivated. It is a gift of God, bestowed upon those ready for the experience, and always it is for a specific purpose. One possessing it may have remaining hidden longings for closer companionship with

those of his family or religious circles, and sometimes even a deep desire for home -- but he has not the capacity to enjoy or remain in them. Often these human desires are leaks in the insulation, or a leftover from the last human experience on earth.

It is this inability to fuse that makes the mystic difficult to live or work with. Always the spiritual light serves as a barrier to emotional reaction -- and for the sake of his friends and relatives, it would be better for one living the monastic life to separate himself from personal contacts. Then the impersonal life of Love is lived without strain or drain upon one's sources of spiritual power.

Only the emotions strain or drain the spiritual capacities, and these are absent when the monastic life is lived apart from family experience. Since all those called to the monastic life are not drawn to the monastery or convent, it is wise to thus withdraw from too close contact with ordinary human living.

Many who are drawn to the monastic life retain for many years the longing for one -- one companion, friend, partner, wife, or husband -- just someone with whom to share every unfolding inner experience and outer fruitage. A 'dark night of the Soul,' which may last many weeks, brings the final release from all attachments, and the monastic life is lived fully in God. Now all human associations and relationships are as impersonal, yet as warm and tender, as that of God to man.

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